

Day Alone with the Lord



A Guide for a Personal Day of Prayer

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THE DAY WITH THE LORD

A personal day of prayer is a wonderful opportunity. It comes to us and we choose it as a gift that is granted to us - a gift in the midst of the challenges, opportunities and perplexities of our lives. As opportunity and gift, the day of prayer enables us to find spiritual and emotional space for an intentional encounter with Christ. And in this encounter, we come to a renewed experience of the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

Few things have such a potential to bring renewed focus, energy and perspective to our life circumstances as a day with the Lord, a day in which we step back, to take a retreat, to be alone. And, of course, we are not alone: we are with the Lord.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes in his spiritual classic, *Life Together*, a day alone with the Lord is an essential means by which we are enabled to live with integrity in community. And, as Bonhoeffer then goes on to insist: the mark of solitude, of our time with the Lord, is silence. Any design or guide for a day of prayer will include readings, guided prayers and exercises. But the central mark of the day will be times of silence. It is in silence that we meet Christ and hear Christ and attend to the inner witness of His Spirit. It is a silence before the Word of God, the Word that shapes our prayers, but also the Word that is God's speaking to us, to the particular circumstances of our lives. And to hear this Word, we need to be still. Silence is the hallmark, the anchor and the central feature of solitude.

So find a place. A quiet church sanctuary, a retreat center - someplace where you will not be distracted, and where you will not be interrupted. Leave the cellular phone at home; find a place of quiet, and stay there for the day. As a parent, find someone to take care of the children for the day, and offer them the same gift in return.

Even in the most still and quiet retreat center, though, it is easy to be distracted. There are noises that we hear in the distance, perhaps the play of a child or the passing of a truck. There are the noises of others, perhaps the shuffling feet or cough of a fellow pray-er. And there are the noises of our own thoughts, the worries, the temptations that distract us from prayer, sometimes unwittingly. Whether the noise is external or internal, now is not the time for irritation or frustration, but rather for coming to quiet in our own hearts and minds, of gently turning from the noise in a conscious and deliberate choice to be still before Lord, our Maker and Redeemer.

Silence is learned. This guide to prayer suggests that we spend 15 - 20 minutes in silence as part of each segment of the day. Stay with the silence. Be still; when distracted, gently bring your thoughts back to the focus of the hour. Avoid the temptation to get up and walk around or to read what is at hand. Be still even when it does not seem, at least immediately, to be worthwhile. And in time you will find that silence does bear fruit, that God is in the silence and that God does speak and that we have the capacity to know and hear the One who loves us.

THE GRACE WE SEEK

A day of prayer is an opportunity to intentionally seek the grace of Christ. In particular, we seek to know, love and serve Jesus. For some, then, the primary benefit of a day of alone with the Lord will be that they enter into the *school of prayer*. Through this practice, we seek to deepen our experience of Christ through prayer, by fostering our capacity for and our experience of intimacy with Christ. The natural bent of our hearts and minds is isolation and autonomy; the day of prayer cultivates our capacity for intimacy. But more, we actually experience Christ, and it is this more than anything else that makes the day worthwhile. And what we find is that our daily prayers are renewed and animated by the occasional experience of an entire day in prayer.

Others come to the day of prayer with a key life-decision on the table, as they seek to know the mind of Christ for a choice they are making. We still have the same objective: to know, love and serve Jesus. But we come to

the day of prayer longing to know the specifics of how this is to find expression in light of a decision we are facing. And surely the critical choices of our lives - whether to remain single or to marry, whether to stay with our current job or respond to another opportunity, how to respond to a significant moral or ethical dilemma, indeed any number of decisions and choices that we are regularly called upon to make - merit extended time alone with God. Surely these choices that not only affect our lives but inevitably shape the lives of others whom we love and serve, require that we take the time to slow down, step aside from the normal routine of life and work, and find the time to be alone with the Lord. When we are facing a critical choice, the grace we seek in a day of prayer, would be to know the guiding witness of the Spirit that enables us to see our circumstances clearly and respond with courage and wisdom in response to the call and guidance of God.

But even if this is our primary longing when we come to the day of prayer - the grace to choose well - the day will always be a school of prayer, an opportunity to foster and cultivate intimacy with Christ. Indeed the grace to see our circumstances clearly, and to be renewed in courage to do what we are being called to do, will arise out of our deepened experience with Christ. And thus the first objective is always to meet Christ and know Christ and grow in our capacity to love and serve him. We never come to the day merely to get a "word from the Lord", to "use" the Lord as nothing but an answer to a dilemma we are facing.

This means that in the course of the day, we can let the longing for God to emerge. Do not force the issue or press God to give you guidance prematurely. Seek the face of Christ and more often than not you will find that your longing for guidance will be fulfilled by the end of the day. God knows what you need and will grant you the peace to do what you are being called to do.

The plan that follows, then, gives particular focus to the grace of Christ to us:

1. The grace to know with assurance the love of God
2. The grace to know the convicting ministry of the Spirit
3. The grace to know the illuminating power of truth.
4. The grace to know guidance in the face of a critical and important choice.

These are four aspects or dimensions of the Spirit's ministry to the Christian, enabling us to cultivate our capacity to know, love and serve Jesus. And each merits focused attention: to seek each grace in turn and to engage the spiritual practices in prayer that enable us to know the specific grace we are seeking.

The order for the day centers on four extended sessions corresponding to the four dimensions of God's grace identified above. Each of these more extended sessions of focused prayer is designed with a specific objective and each builds on the grace experienced in previous session. The plan for this self-guided day of prayer is adapted from the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola.

Each of the four major sessions has a similar structure or internal order:

- Identify the grace to be sought; through a prayer of intercession we will ask God for this grace and prepare our hearts to receive it.
- Consider a Psalm that highlights this grace and, as we identify with the psalm, cultivate our capacity to receive this grace.
- Practice the assigned exercise which arises out of the Psalm, that enables us to know the grace for this "hour."
- Silence

- Journal entry, in which one gives written expression to the experience of prayer in this session.

These four sessions are then placed within the framework of a day that includes both a preparatory prayer time as well as a conclusion.

AN ORDER TO THE DAY

It is usually best to approach a day of prayer with a plan or an order to the day. An order does not diminish spontaneity or the free work of the Spirit; it is rather an expression of intentionality. We come to the day with a longing to know the grace of Christ, and thus choose an approach that will most likely foster our experience of Christ. Further, this order or intentionality helps keep us focused on Christ. It is all too easy for a day of prayer to be an extended time of personal solitude and nothing more. In itself this may be good and what some need. We all need times of solitude. But a day of prayer is specifically a day ***with the Lord***. And the value of an order to the day is that our minds easily wander, our hearts are prone to self-indulgence, and a guide to prayer keeps us about what we came here for: to cultivate our capacity to know, love and serve Jesus. While there are any number of ways in which we could order our day, the approach outlined in the pages has a design that will be helpful to most. It is helpful to divide the day into four central or primary sessions - corresponding to the four ways in which the grace of Christ will be sought, along with a session of preparation at the beginning and a concluding session that includes a benediction.

Consider the following as potential "times" for your prayers. These times are merely a suggestion and the pray-er or retreatant should adapt and adjust these segments for prayer in a manner congruent with the flow of their own needs.

8.00 – 8.30 am	Prelude: Beginning well.
8:30 - 10:00 am	Session #1
10:00 - 10.30 am	Break
10:30 - 12:00 noon	Session #2
12:00 noon - 1:00 pm	Break
1:00 - 2:30 pm	Session #3
2:30 - 3:00 pm	Break
3:00 - 4:30 pm	Session #4
4:30 - 5.00 pm	Postlude: conclusion and benediction
5:00 pm	We go in peace.

A NOTE ON THE CENTRAL PLACE OF THE PSALMS

For a day of prayer there are few if any resources as significant as the Old Testament Psalms. These are the prayers of the church, of the people of God. It makes sense for them to inform our prayers. And therefore, a Psalm will be suggested for each of the four prayer periods of the day; and the approach to each will follow a similar order:

- identify the spiritual longing or emotional aspiration of the Psalm;
- identify the foundational truth or doctrinal principle that will enable this longing or aspiration to be fulfilled;
- identify the spiritual exercise by which one can live in the light of this truth and experience the fulfillment of this longing or aspiration.

ALONE WITH THE LORD

Having set up the day, we are ready to begin. We have a quiet place to be alone with minimal distraction; we have our Bible and notebook in hand.

PRELUDE: BEGINNING WELL

Suggested time: 8.00 – 8.30 am

It is helpful to begin slowly, to enter into the day with an overview of the whole, of the grace that we seek for this day and its constituent parts.

To this end, read Isaiah 55 (below). As you read, note that the structure of this chapter of Scripture corresponds to the structure of the day of prayer. Read conscious of the way the Spirit is drawing you into this day with Christ, and in a way that will anticipate the flow of the day.

Read slowly; read aloud, perhaps read it twice. Be attentive to each phrase. Make notes as you read. What stands out to you and impresses itself on your mind?

For Reflection

A spiritual life is simply a life in which all that we do comes from the center, where we are anchored in God; a life soaked through and through by a sense of His reality and claim, and self-given to the great movement of His will.

To enter consciously into the spiritual life will mean time and attention given to it; a deliberate drawing-in from the circumference to the center, that 'setting of life in order'.

The Spiritual Life; Evelyn Underhill

He who is in a hurry delays the things of God.

St. Vincent de Paul

ISAIAH 55

(New Revised Standard Version)

The Call to Listen (vs. 1-3a)

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

The Assurance of God's Love (vs. 3b - 5)

I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

The Call to Repentance and the Confidence of God's Forgiveness (vs. 6 - 7)

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

The Call to Live in the Truth, Confident of its Redemptive Power

(vs 8 -11)

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

The Call to Live in Joy and Receive God's Guidance in Peace

(vs 12 -13)

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Having read Isaiah 55, identify what you anticipate will be a central or defining element of the day for you. Is it primarily the grace to know that you are loved, the grace to know the convicting ministry of the Spirit or the illuminating power of truth? Or is it the grace to go out with peace and joy, confident in God's guidance in the midst of a critical choice? Usually when we come to a day of prayer, one of these will stand out to us; our reading of Isaiah 55 can serve to highlight our own longings as we come to this day, specifically if there is one dimension of God's grace that really stands out to us.

Knowing this, you do not need to rush the time, or seek this grace immediately. We can approach the day confident that the time to see this grace will come. We can approach the day in a slow, methodical fashion that is consistent with the pace of God's work in your heart. We can give the day over to God, letting go of the need to control or force the day to arrive at a particular conclusion. We can enter into each phase of the day confident that God knows the longing of our hearts.

Each of the sessions to follow, then, will focus in sequence on the four dimensions of grace that we seek. For each, we will (1) pray a prayer seeking this grace; (2) consider a Psalm that cultivates a receptivity to this grace; (3) engage a spiritual practice or discipline that enables us to appropriate the grace; (4) in silence seek to know Christ and receive his grace; and (5) reflect in writing, in a journal, on our experience of prayer.

The Grace to Know that I Am Loved

The spiritual life rests on only one possible foundation: the deep assurance that we are loved, the confidence that God loves us just as we are. And so, of course, we begin here, with a session in prayer in which we seek this grace: a deep, heart-felt assurance that God loves us personally, specifically; that God knows us, calls us by name and loves us.

1. **Center thoughts:** request the grace for this hour, to be "rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3: 17). Note how this grace is situated in the prayer of St. Paul in Ephesians 3:14-19.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

2. **Consider Psalm 100**

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.*

*Know that the LORD is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give
thanks to him, bless his name.*

*For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

The three-fold approach to the Psalms that we are using:

- Identify the sentiment or spiritual longing: to know the love of God that endures forever. Joy is found in this assurance.
- Consider the truth of doctrinal confidence that serves as the basis of the longing: God is good, and he is faithful to all generations.
- Note the spiritual discipline that enables us to live in this truth: the most fundamental discipline of the spiritual life . . . Thanksgiving (we enter this "gates" through the act of giving thanks for the goodness of God).

3. **The Spiritual Practice or Discipline** that enables us to know grace for this hour, the assurance that we are loved: ***Thanksgiving***.

And so we give thanks. We enumerate the signs, the evidence of God's goodness. How has God been good to me? Personally and specifically, how God has been good to me.

Identify ten (10) things for which you are grateful; ten indicators of God's goodness...not in the vague general sense, but consider specifically: "How has God been good to me." Write them down. . . enter them into the journal, thinking particularly of the recent past.

- After a few moments of silence, identify ten (10) more things for which to give thanks.
- And then, after another time of silence (3-5 minutes), identify ten (10) more things for which to give thanks.

4. **Silence.** Dwell in the conscious awareness of God's goodness (15-20 minutes).

5. **Make a Journal Entry.** What stands out so far from your prayer?

For Reflection

Be bold enough always to believe that God is on your side and wholly yours, whatever you may think of yourself.

Rejoice that you are what you are; for our Lord loves you very dearly. He loves the whole of you, just as you are. Remember that it is our souls which are God's joy; not on account of what they do for Him, but on account of what He does for them. All that He asks of them is to gladly accept his kindness, his generosity, his tolerance, his fatherly love.

Letters of Direction, Abbé de Tourville

There is nothing in this universe that is easier to obtain than the enjoyment of Jesus Christ. Your Lord is more present to you than you are to yourself; his desire to give Himself to you is greater than your desire to lay hold of Him. The Lord gives you the experience of enjoying His presence. He touches you, and His touch is so delightful that, more than ever, you are drawn inwardly to Him.

- *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ, Jeanne Guyon*

The Grace to Know the Convicting and Liberating Ministry of the Spirit

The encounter with God necessarily means that we come face to face with ourselves, and this includes an awareness of how we have failed God "in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone," to quote the line from the classic liturgical prayers of confession. Thus our day includes the simple act of seeking to respond with heart and mind to the convicting ministry of the Spirit.

1. **Center thoughts:** request the grace for this hour: To know the convicting ministry of the Spirit, the liberating ministry of the Spirit. The Spirit does not condemn. The Spirit convicts us of sin in a manner that enables us to walk in freedom. This grace is alluded to in the words of Jesus when he speaks of the Spirit as one who would come to convict the world of sin (John 16:8); and it finds eager expression in the wonderful words of Psalm 139:23-24.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

2. **Consider Psalm 32.**

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*

*Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

*While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.*

*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

*Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress,
the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.
You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.*

*I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose
temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near
you.*

*Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.
Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all
you upright in heart.*

The three fold approach to the Psalm.

- The sentiment or spiritual longing: to know God's forgiveness.
- The truth of doctrinal confidence that serves as the basis of the longing: God is one who forgives.
- The spiritual practice that enables us to live in this reality: Confession (also known as the examination of conscience).

3 **The Spiritual Discipline** that enables us to know the ministry of the Spirit: **Confession.**

Confession involves several distinct acts:

- We acknowledge wrong, that what we have said or done is inconsistent with the character and will of God;
- That we are responsible, and that we cannot blame others or claim extenuating circumstances;
- That we ask for mercy: "Christ have mercy."
- And that we receive the forgiveness of God, confident of this forgiveness.

And so with a quiet heart, with open hands, consider how the Spirit may be convicting you of sin. However, you must be alert to false guilt, the burdensome and crippling guilt that we feel because we have not accepted God's forgiveness in the past, or the guilt we feel in response to the expectations of others, or the guilt we feel where we have failed to live up to our own expectations. This is burdensome and useless guilt. As we are able to acknowledge false guilt, we find that the liberating and convicting call of the Spirit emerges.

4. **Silence** (15 - 20 minutes)

5. **Journal entry** (what has emerged in your prayers in this hour?).

For Reflection

In the presence of Holiness we become acutely conscious of how unholy we are and of how much we are in need of forgiveness. God's revelation of sin and sinful tendencies is enabling; it gives us courage to pick ourselves up and reform our lives. When God reveals sin to us it is always with the purpose of moving us to amendment of life and of giving us the power to change.

Finding God in All Things; A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. William A. Barry, SJ

The Grace to Know the Illuminating Power of Truth

We live in freedom when we live in the truth; we are transformed by the renewal of our minds. The Spirit renews and transforms us only insofar as we engage the truth with heart and mind, particularly the truth revealed through Holy Scripture.

1. **The Grace we seek** is captured by the words of Colossians 3:15-16.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

We seek to be women and men in whom the Word of Christ dwells richly; but this will only be the case as the peace of Christ rules in our hearts. And so our day of prayer needs to be one in which we cultivate a meekness of heart, a posture of joyful receptivity to the Word of God (see also 1 Thess.1:6 and James 1: 18-21).

2. **Consider Psalm 119:1-16.**

Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.

*You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.
O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!
Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.*

I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous ordinances. I will observe your statutes; do not utterly forsake me.

How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.

Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes. With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

The three fold approach to the Psalm.

- The sentiment or spiritual longing: to know the joy of living in the truth.
- The truth of doctrinal confidence that serves as the basis of the longing: God is our Teacher.
- The spiritual practice that enables us to live in this reality: Meditation.

3. **The Spiritual Discipline** by which we appropriate the grace for this "hour": **Meditation.**

Through meditation we read the Scriptures in a manner that respects and honors their character. This is the Word of God and we attend to this Word recognizing that in reading we feed our souls and sustain our lives. However, this is human text, letters and oracles, psalms and narratives, which while written through the inspiration of the Spirit are still human texts. And we hear the Word of God as we attend to these human texts, and read poetry as poetry, narrative as narrative, letter as letter, and so on.

And the objective of this practice is to know, love and serve Christ. While our meditation is on the text, we come and listen and long that through the text we might know Christ. For this, we must monitor our emotional response, and cultivate our capacity for meekness, so that we receive the Word with joy.

Select a text from those identified on the next page, a text appropriate to your circumstances, perhaps. As you consider the options for this reading, you can assume that the Spirit will draw your attention to one over against the others, and you can respond accordingly.

Choose one of the following texts for meditation:

1. Read the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians. Read it through twice noting in particular what strikes you in the second reading, attentive to the fundamental principles that shape the Christian life. This is a good choice if you have plenty of time. And what you want to see is the big picture of God's call to live as a Christian.

2. Read two chapters from the prophet Isaiah 40:1-11; Isaiah 58. Read attentively to the way in which the texts reveal the character of God, both His mercy and gracious manner and also His firm and specific call to live with Christian integrity.

3. Read two accounts about Jesus and His encounters with others: Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:40-48. Read each story several times. One story at a time, imagine yourself in that place and time. Choose to be 1 of the character or an inanimate object. Begin by noticing the details in the story. What do you see? Smell? Feel? Hear? Taste? Think? Watch the situation as it unfolds. Listen to what is said. What is said to you? In each case, the focus is Jesus— what He says, what He does, and what it means for you. Tell Him about your concerns. Listen to His response. Reply to Him. Seek specifically a personal encounter with the Christ who is revealed to us through these texts. Take with you the 'feel' of the whole experience. Present that to God. Be open to God. Thank God. Listen to God.

Choose one of these options. Read the assigned text slowly, with consideration for the context and genre of the passage, its flow or presentation (all along attentive to your emotional response to the text).

What stands out for you in the text? What strikes you or leaves an impression on your consciousness. . . not as a truth that others need to know, but a truth that is pertinent to your own circumstances, calling and relationships. This distinction is important, for the purpose of the day of prayer is not to hear God's word for others, but to hear God's specific word to us, in our circumstances and need. Avoid the temptation that often arises, to see how this text might help others, how it might be the basis for a sermon or a Bible study. That might come at a later time; but for now, we are opening our hearts to the Spirit's illumination of our minds.

4. **Silence** (15 - 20 minutes). Dwell in the truth, the reality that has been revealed through the words of Holy Scripture.

5. **Journal entry.**

For Reflection

Contemplative prayer is a conversation in which God's word has the initiative and we, for the moment, can be nothing more than listeners.

The contemplative has to be clay in the hand of the potter, a clay which is molded through prayer itself, content not to know in advance where it is going, only sensing it, as the process is actually taking place, from the disposition of the potter's shaping hands, confident that it is a good and loving work taking place.

- *Prayer*, Hans Urs von Balthasar

The Grace to Know Guidance in a Critical and Important Choice.

As mentioned at the beginning, some will be coming to the day of prayer precisely because they seek guidance or direction in the face of a critical choice that they need to make. However, even if the day is first and foremost a school of prayer, an opportunity for retreat and spiritual and emotional renewal, we come to the conclusion of the day conscious that we are being called back into the world. And with this fourth prayer session our praying recognizes that we now anticipate our return to the day-to-day duties and relationships of our lives. We move from retreat to re-engagement. And what we seek is the grace to live in the world in a manner that consciously arises out of our prayers. If we are making a critical choice, we long that this choice would be informed by our prayers and by our experience of encounter with Christ. For all, though what we seek is that our prayers would not be an escape from the world but an experience that would enable us to live with integrity and grace in the world.

1. **The Grace we seek:** to know the peace of God for the choice we need to make (that, in the words of Isaiah 55, we would "go out with joy and be led back in peace.") This grace is highlighted by the words of Philippians 4:7:

*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

2. **Consider Psalm 23.**

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff-- they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.*

The three fold approach to the Psalm.

- The sentiment or spiritual longing: to know God's personal guidance.
- The truth of doctrinal confidence that serves as the basis of the longing: God's providential care and goodness.
- The spiritual practice that enables us to live in this reality: A deep confidence, not fear, but a non-anxious comfort in the assurance of God's guidance. For this we need to discern God's peace.

For Reflection

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live some distant day into the answers. - Rilke

3. **The Spiritual Practice** by which we appropriate this grace: ***Discernment.***

As we consider our days, particularly a choice that lies before us, where and in what ways do we sense God's peace? Be alert to the presence of desolation, knowing that God does not lead in desolation: the presence of fear, anger or discouragement needs to cause us to reconsider and reflect again. For, God only leads in peace.

But the peace needs to be tested, to be assured that it is of God. And it is fruitful to test the peace by asking three questions - each a reflection of the classic temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness. And each is worthy of a slow, considered prayer. It could be that during the course of the day, particularly now as we come to the conclusion of the day, we begin to have a sense of what it is that God is calling us to do. We may sense that we have peace about a potential course of action. Now we need to discern if this peace comes from God, and to test this peace we pause, consider, reflect and prayerfully ask ourselves the three classic questions:

- Is there anything in this peace that arises from an inordinate (excessive, controlling) desire for wealth or financial security?
- Is there anything in this peace that arises from an inordinate desire for power or influence?
- Is there anything in this peace that arises from an inordinate longing for recognition or affirmation?

Can we say that in large measure we long for and seek nothing but God's good and perfect will (Romans 12:2)? That we seek that which reflects the "true...honorable...just...and pure. . ."(Phil 4:8)?

4. **Silence** (15 - 20 minutes)

5. **Journal Entry.**

For Reflection

Discernment gives attention to the desires, affections and yearnings of the heart. To ignore what we want or desire not only violates personal integrity but refuses to listen to God's effort to communicate with us.

Swimming in the Sun; Albert Haase

CONCLUSION AND BENEDICTION Suggested time: 4.30- 5.00 pm

1. Read through the journal entries for the day.

Be attentive to the recurring themes; note connections between the entries and the way in which entries at one point in the day have new meaning in light of earlier or later entries.

2. Consider what from this day needs to be shared with others:

- with a spiritual director, spiritual friend, pastor or accountability group;
- with those with whom one lives, either a spouse or housemate;
- with those who are affected by what might arise from this day.

3. A Concluding Benediction from Numbers 6:24-26.

*The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. AMEN*



Adapted from Gordon T. Smith's retreat and used with permission

Citations and Customized prayers added by
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